



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

between historical and personal narrative. He gives a tolerably full and connected account of the war; and his relation, being enlivened by passages of personal experience and by description of scenes from actual observation, will probably be read by many persons who would not be likely to engage in the perusal of a methodical history. He seems, indeed, to have intended his book for the great newspaper-reading public,—the same public that he addressed in his letters; and for this portion of the community it is excellently adapted. The narratives drawn from direct observation are often conducted with much spirit, and the volume contains material of which the future historian will be glad to make use.

But as a purely literary work, its chief claim to attention is in its popular character. It shows how the New-Englander of average culture looks at his country and the war, how he feels about them, what he cares to read concerning them. The critic who regards the book from this point of view will find little that is not satisfactory in it, and much to which he can afford praise.

16. — *Venetian Life.* By W. D. HOWELLS. New York: Hurd and Houghton. 1866. 12mo. pp. 359.

THOSE of our readers who watch with any interest the favorable omens of our literature from time to time, must have had their eyes drawn to short poems, remarkable for subtilty of sentiment and delicacy of expression, and bearing the hitherto unfamiliar name of Mr. Howells. Such verses are not common anywhere; as the work of a young man they are very uncommon. Youthful poets commonly begin by trying on various manners before they settle upon any single one that is prominently their own. But what especially interested us in Mr. Howells was, that his writings were from the very first not merely tentative and preliminary, but had somewhat of the conscious security of matured *style*. This is something which most poets arrive at through much tribulation. It is something which has nothing to do with the measure of their intellectual powers or of their moral insight, but is the one quality which essentially distinguishes the artist from the mere man of genius. Among the English poets of the last generation, Keats is the only one who early showed unmistakable signs of it, and developed it more and more fully until his untimely death. Wordsworth, though in most respects a far profounder man, attained it only now and then, indeed only once perfectly,—in his “*Laodamia*.” Now, though it be undoubtedly true from one point of view that what a man has to say is of more

importance than how he says it, and that modern criticism especially is more apt to be guided by its moral and even political sympathies than by æsthetic principles, it remains as true as ever that only those things have been said finally which have been said perfectly, and that this finished utterance is peculiarly the office of poetry, or of what, for want of some word as comprehensive as the German *Dichtung*, we are forced to call imaginative literature. Indeed, it may be said that, in whatever kind of writing, it is style alone that is able to hold the attention of the world long. Let a man be never so rich in thought, if he is clumsy in the expression of it, his sinking, like that of an old Spanish treasure-ship, will be hastened by the very weight of his bullion, and perhaps, after the lapse of a century, some lucky diver fishes up his ingots and makes a fortune out of him.

That Mr. Howells gave unequivocal indications of possessing this fine quality interested us in his modest preludings. Marked, as they no doubt were, by some uncertainty of aim and indefiniteness of thought, that "stinting," as Chaucer calls it, of the nightingale "ere he beginneth sing," there was nothing in them of the presumption and extravagance which young authors are so apt to mistake for originality and vigor. Sentiment predominated over reflection, as was fitting in youth; but there was a refinement, an instinctive reserve of phrase, and a felicity of epithet, only too rare in modern, and especially in American writing. He was evidently a man more eager to make something good than to make a sensation,—one of those authors more rare than ever in our day of hand-to-mouth cleverness, who has a conscious ideal of excellence, and, as we hope, the patience that will at length reach it. We made occasion to find out something about him, and what we learned served to increase our interest. This delicacy, it appeared, was a product of the rough-and-ready West, this finish the natural gift of a young man with no advantage of college-training, who, passing from the compositor's desk to the editorship of a local newspaper, had been his own faculty of the humanities. But there are some men who are born cultivated. A singular fruit, we thought, of our shaggy democracy,—as interesting a phenomenon in that regard as it has been our fortune to encounter. Where is the rudeness of a new community, the pushing vulgarity of an imperfect civilization, the licentious contempt of forms that marks our unchartered freedom, and all the other terrible things which have so long been the bugaboos of European refinement? Here was a natural product, as perfectly natural as the deliberate attempt of "Walt Whitman" to answer the demand of native and foreign misconception was perfectly artificial. Our institutions do not, then, irretrievably doom us to coarseness and to impatience of that restraining prece-

dent which alone makes true culture possible and true art attainable. Unless we are mistaken, there is something in such an example as that of Mr. Howells which is a better argument for the American social and political system than any empirical theories that can be constructed against it.

We know of no single word which will so fitly characterize Mr. Howells's new volume about Venice as "delightful." The artist has studied his subject for four years, and at last presents us with a series of pictures having all the charm of tone and the minute fidelity to nature which were the praise of the Dutch school of painters, but with a higher sentiment, a more refined humor, and an airy elegance that recalls the better moods of Watteau. We do not remember any Italian studies so faithful or the result of such continuous opportunity, unless it be the *Roba di Roma* of Mr. Story, and what may be found scattered in the works of Henri Beyle. But Mr. Story's volumes recorded only the chance observations of a quick and familiar eye in the intervals of a profession to which one must be busily devoted who would rise to the acknowledged eminence occupied by their author; and Beyle's mind, though singularly acute and penetrating, had too much of the hardness of a man of the world and of Parisian cynicism to be altogether agreeable. Mr. Howells, during four years of that consular leisure which only Venice could make tolerable, devoted himself to the minute study of the superb prison to which he was doomed, and his book is his "*Prigioni*." Venice has been the university in which he has fairly earned the degree of Master. There is, perhaps, no European city, not even Bruges, not even Rome herself, which, not yet in ruins, is so wholly of the past, at once alive and turned to marble, like the Prince of the Black Islands in the story. And what gives it a peculiar fascination is that its antiquity, though venerable, is yet modern, and, so to speak, continuous; while that of Rome belongs half to a former world and half to this, and is broken irretrievably in two. The glory of Venice, too, was the achievement of her own genius, not an inheritance; and, great no longer, she is more truly than any other city the monument of her own greatness. She is something wholly apart, and the silence of her watery streets accords perfectly with the spiritual mood which makes us feel as if we were passing through a city of dream. Fancy now an imaginative young man from Ohio, where the log-hut was but yesterday turned to almost less enduring brick and mortar, set down suddenly in the midst of all this almost immemorial permanence of grandeur. We cannot think of any one on whom the impression would be so strangely deep, or whose eyes would be so quickened by the constantly recurring shock of unfamiliar objects. Most

men are poor observers, because they are cheated into a delusion of intimacy with the things so long and so immediately about them; but surely we may hope for something like seeing from fresh eyes, and those too a poet's, when they open suddenly on a marvel so utterly alien to their daily vision and so perdurably novel as Venice. Nor does Mr. Howells disappoint our expectation. We have here something like a full-length portrait of the Lady of the Lagoons.

We have been struck in this volume, as elsewhere in writings of the same author, with the charm of *tone* that pervades it. It is so constant as to bear witness, not only to a real gift, but to the thoughtful cultivation of it. Here and there Mr. Howells yields to the temptation of *execution*, to which persons specially felicitous in language are liable, and pushes his experiments of expression to the verge of being unidiomatic, in his desire to squeeze the last drop of significance from words; but this is seldom, and generally we receive that unconscious pleasure in reading him which comes of naturalness, the last and highest triumph of good writing. Mr. Howells, of all men, does not need to be told that, as wine of the highest flavor and most delicate *bouquet* is made from juice pressed out by the unaided weight of the grapes, so in expression we are in danger of getting something like acridness if we crush in with the first sprightly runnings the skins and kernels of words in our vain hope to win more than we ought of their color and meaning. But, as we have said, this is rather a temptation to which he now and then shows himself liable, than a fault for which he can often be blamed. If a mind open to all poetic impressions, a sensibility too sincere ever to fall into maudlin sentimentality, a style flexible and sweet without weakness, and a humor which, like the bed of a stream, is the support of deep feeling, and shows waveringly through it in spots of full sunshine,—if such qualities can make a truly delightful book, then Mr. Howells has made one in the volume before us. And we give him warning that much will be expected of one who at his years has already shown himself capable of so much.

-
17. *Manomin: a Rhythmical Romance of Minnesota, the Great Rebellion, and the Minnesota Massacres.* By MYRON COLONEY. St. Louis: Published by the Author. 1866. 16mo. pp. xv., 297.

THIS book is a genuine product of America. In spirit and in form it is an honest growth of our soil. The motive and treatment of the story told, the faith and humanity manifested in it, and its natural poetry, are not less characteristic of our special civilization than the frequent cru-